

## [James B. Read]

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NATIVE SONS OF NEW MEXICO

JAMES B. READ

Almost a century has now passed since the American invasion of New Mexico and the almost bloodless conquest of the Territory by General Kearney and his troops. A bloodless entry into Las Vegas, a small battle near Glorieta Glorieta, and skirmished with unorganized mountaineers along the Santa Fe Trail, and Kearney's dragoons entered Santa Fe, and found things so quiet that the commanding officer, tired after a hard days' ride, went to bed in the old Palace of the Governors' and put off until the next day, the formal ceremonies of taking possession of the city.

There can be no question of the patriotism and love of country of the Spanish-American people of Santa Fe and New Mexico generally, whose ancestors had lived in the country for a hundred and fifty years, following the reconquest in 1692. And some of whom had been here even earlier, before the Indian rebellion.

But in the short space of a quarter of a century, they had become so disgusted with the gross incompetence and monumental grafting of the officials of the Mexican Republic that they were ready to submit to the rule of a people, alien in blood, laws and customs, to say nothing of religion.

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Also, as a contributing factor to the peaceful conquest, the Santa Fe Trail had been opened at about the same time as the Mexican Revolution; they had begun to do their trading with St. Louis instead of Chihuahua in old Mexico, and the ricos were 2 sending their children to the States for an American education.

There was besides the hatred and fear of those invaders from the southeast, the Tejanos, or Texans, with whom Governor Armijo had had several battles in the years 1840-45 just before the American entry.

Like soldiers in other campaigns since Caesar's Gallic wars, and even following the example of their Spanish predecessors in the army of De Vargas, some of the American soldiers, whether from choice or the exigency of their military duties, instead of following Kearney to California, remained in New Mexico, married Spanish women, and raised families of children, who while loyal to the flag that flew over them, drew in with their mother's milk the intense local patriotism and love of their native New Mexico, which distinguish the Spanish American people.

Among the most prominent American soldiers who remained in New Mexico, after the departure of General Kearney, and who helped to inaugurate the civil government of the United States in the territory, was Captain Benjamin Franklin Read, U.S.A., grandfather of James B. Read.

Captain Read was descended from Revolutionary stock, his grandfather having been one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and having such a strong friendship and regard for Benjamin Franklin that in each following generation at least one son bore the name Benjamin, either as a first or as 3 a middle name.

Within two or three years after coming to New Mexico, Captain Read married Ynacia Cano, daughter of an old Spanish family of Sante Fe, and in 1858, left her a widow with three young sons.

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Mrs. Ynacia Read raised these three boys, sending them to the parochial schools of Santa Fe and to St. Micheal's College, which education they afterwards supplemented by their own efforts. They all grew to be a credit to her and their dead father.

They were Alexander, afterward District Attorney for Santa Fe and Rio Arriba counties; Benjamin F., author of the only authoritative history of New Mexico, and Larkin C. Read, afterward State superintendent of schools.

James Bassuet Read, son of Larkin G. Read and Teodora Martinez, was born in Santa Fe, New Mexico, July 15, 1873, so that he is now in his 58th year but looks to be several years younger.

He attended the public schools of Santa Fe and later St. Micheal's College.

He first entered the employ of the First National Bank of Santa Fe and except for about nine months service in the army during the Spanish American War, has continuously been employed in the bank from that time until 1923, a term of 27 years, where he received an excellent financial training under the late Levi Hughes, President of the Bank. In 4 his first few years in the bank, he also had the guidance of his father, who died in [1803?], when his son had reached the age of twenty years. His father had been brought up to follow strict principles of rigid honesty by his Spanish mother, Dona Ynacia Read, a woman of strong force of character.

While attending St. Micheal's College, young Larkin, then a boy of about sixteen, was employed week-ends and during the summer vacation as clerk and interpreter for Territorial Governor Giddings (about 1872) who had his office in the old Governor's Palace.

One day, needing currency for some purpose, the Governor sent Larkin across the Plaza to the bank with a check for [\$150.00?]. The cashier in the rush of business and not knowing what the Governor wanted the money for, glanced at the check, and going back

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to the vault, made up a bundle of currency amounting to \$1500.00 and gave it to young Read. Larkin thought there was something wrong but took the money back to Governor Giddings and called his attention to the mistake.

The Governor counted out the \$150.00 he had sent for and told the boy to return the rest of the money to the banker who had not yet realized his error. He thanked Larkin profusely and sent him to the Governor with a note.

"Get this boy the best of clothes for his size you 5 can find in Santa Fe. Many thanks, Governor."

"All right, Larkin, let's go over to Seligman's." And Governor Giddings took the boy and bought him a new suit of clothes, etc. Proud of his new suit, the boy took it home and showed it to his mother. But Abuela Ynacia was not so easily satisfied and took the boy back to Governor Giddings' office.

"Por que you buy my boy these clothes?"

The Governor explained at considerable length that the suit was a reward from the banker, for the boy's honesty in returning the money and only then would she allow Larkin to take the suit home and show it to his admiring brothers.

After serving an apprenticeship of fourteen years in the bank from 1896 to 1910, from messenger, clerk and bookkeeper and teller, in which he mastered the details of the clerical work of the bank, he was promoted to assistant cashier in 1910. Still with watchful guidance of Mr. Hughes, he gained a knowledge of the larger problems of the banking business and able to bear larger responsibilities and in 1915 was promoted to cashier, where he served until 1923. From 1919 to 1923 Mr. Read officiated as State Bank Examiner in addition to his work as cashier of the First National Bank in Santa Fe.

At this time the First National Bank of Santa Fe was the largest and as it still is, one of the strongest banks in the State of New Mexico.

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At this time, Mr. Hughes was trying to help the cattle men of New Mexico out of the difficulties they had gotten into during the World War and to protect them from the repacity and incompetence of the bureaucrats in charge of the War Finance Corporation.

Mr. Hughes was covertly sneered at by Eastern lawyers as a sort of "David Harum" banker, but even though, through his life-long association and acquaintance with cattle men and farmers of New Mexico "he had the common touch", he could also "walk with Kings", and with his mastery of financial problems, even lay down the law to them. In this work and the voluminous detail work it entailed, he was ably seconded by his young cashier. The burden finally proved too much for Mr. Hughes and broke his health and no doubt shortened his life by ten years.

Mr. Read served as cashier of the Santa Fe bank until 1923, where a business opportunity brought him to Taos.

From the time of the American occupation until after the beginning of the century, the banking business (if such it could be called) of Taos, was conducted under very primitive conditions. Sheep men, farmers and others, left their ready cash with the merchants of the town, Bent and St. Vrain, Antonio Joseph, Don Juan Santistevan and later, with Gusdorf Brothers, and McCarthy, Peter Dolan and others. These merchants made loans on sheep and wool, mostly "character loans", 7 depending almost entirely on their personal judgment for the safety of their money. Costly losses and a robbery or two caused them to attempt to start a bank in Taos, which were rather abortive because the men in charge were not trained bankers.

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A First National Bank of Taos, as organized about 1919 with Alex Gusdorf as President and other business men as directors. This proved unworkable and the bank was soon changed to the First State Bank of Taos in 1920, which [it?] has remained ever since.

Alex Gusdorf died in 1923 and the late Dr. T. P. Martin was elected President. The doctor, who had been living in Taos since 1896, was a man of good business judgment, and a wide acquaintance over northern New Mexico but could not spare the time from his extensive practice, and the clerical force was poorly trained in the handling of banking routine.

In this emergency, Dr. Martin appealed to his old time pioneer friend, Levi Hughes, to loan him a man from his staff, to take over the work of examining loans, and to train his office force.

The doctor and Jim Read, who had known one another for years, made a satisfactory arrangement and Read and his wife came to Taos, where he and the doctor lived as close neighbors and friends until the latter's death in 1935.

Taos was not an unknown quantity to Jim Read! He had visited the old town at various times, was acquainted with many of the business men and his father had started his career as an educator in Taos.

The Read family has been connected with the history of Taos at various times during the past hundred years so that when Jim Read came to Taos to take charge of the Bank, he was but following in the footsteps of his father and other ancestors.

His mother, Teodora Martinez, was the grand daughter of Antonio Martinez, who brought the first printing press to New Mexico with which Padre Martinez printed "El Crepusculo" (The Dawn), the first newspaper in New Mexico, in Taos. Besides this, he

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printed text books for his school and other books which are still in possession of [the?] Read family.

In 1877, Jim's father, Larkin G. Read, then a young man of 21 and starting his career as a school teacher, came to Taos at the request of the late Archbishop Lamy and taught in the parochial school.

He returned in 1883 and spent another year in the schools of Taos.

When Jim Read came to Taos, the First State Bank, was located in the [Monsaner?] Building at the southwest corner of the Plaza, where Mollands' Drug Store is now. Expanding business and the need for larger and more commodious quarters caused the directors to construct their own building at the northwest corner of the Plaza to which they moved in September 1929.

Mr. Read served as cashier of the First State Bank 9 from 1923 until January 1936, where he was elected Vice President with Mrs. Bertha Gusdorf as President to succeed the late Dr. T. P. Martin.

Mr. Read is in active charge and control of the policy of the bank, with Mr. C. D. Secrest in charge of the office routine as cashier.

The gradual decline or at least stand still, of the sheep and wool and farming business and the growth in volume and value of the tourist business and the growth in general business and population in the old town in the last fifteen years, brought new problems for the banker to solve, which he has done to the satisfaction of his directors, if not always to the satisfaction of the customers, or would-be customers of the bank. He has been accused of ultra-conservatism in the making of loans, but the steady growth in the volume of deposits and even in the amount of loans to justify his judgment even though he may at times appear to loan over backwards in conservatism.

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Several stories are current which illustrate his caution. One fly-by-night promoter was heard to say "That fellow in the bank can say No! in 57 different languages."

On another occasion, a party who had failed to secure a loan and has some what disgruntled, was heard to remark, "What does that fellow Read know about banking? He never loaned a dollar in his life."

This vary astuteness, however, brought him the position of President of the New Mexico State Bankers Association in 10 1933-34.

During the Spanish American War, young Read enlisted in the First Regiment of New Mexico Territorial Volunteers in June 1898 and was mustered out as a corporal in February 1899. His regiment spent most of their nine months service in camp at Albamy, Georgia.

He returned to his work in the Santa Fe Bank and his father, Larkin G. Read, died in the fall of that same year, 1899.

He was married June 22, [1906?], to Myrtle G. Hampel, of Santa Fe, who came to Taos with him in 1923 and who now has a flower, gift and curio store at the northeast corner of the Plaza.

In 1935 they purchased the house on North Pueblo Avenue formerly owned by Carol Dwire of the Forest Service, who had been transferred to Alamogordo.

Mr. and Mrs. Read had no children of their own and in 1912 adopted Leona Griffin, and brought her to Taos in 1923. She studied art in Taos and for a while in New York City, and showed some ability. While in New York she met Desmond O'Ryan, a young Canadian, son of an official of the Canadian Pacific Railroad. They mere married in Taos in September 1930 and spent sometime in Calcutta, India, where Mr. O'Ryan is connected with the English Civil Service. Mrs. O'Ryan is the owner of the old Pablo



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Martinez hacienda at Ranchitos, one of the oldest and largest houses in the vicinity of Taos.

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Mr. Read is fully, if not quite, six feet tall, weighs about 170 pounds, dark complexion and black hair, some what sprinkled with gray, but looks younger than his years. He is always well dressed and has the erect soldierly carriage inherited from his grandfather. He speaks both Spanish and English fluently, having learned both languages in his boyhood.

He is very fond of flowers, raising them at home and bringing a large bunch of them to the bank nearly every morning to decorate his desk and others in the bank.

He is very fond of children, and the children are very fond of him. It is nothing unusual for him to stop on the street and joke and laugh with them or for some toddler of three or four to call out, "Hello Jim."

### SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Personal history and business career from interview with Mr. Read.

Information on Larkin G. Read from Lewis Illustrated History of New Mexico, 1895.

Personal knowledge.